

**Mario Brdar**

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University  
Osijek

**Marina, Rakova, Gergely Pethő, Csilla Rákosi, eds. 2007. *The Cognitive Basis of Polysemy*. (Metalinguistica 19). Frankfurt am Main - Berlin - Bern - Bruxelles - New York - Oxford - Wien: Peter Lang. 978-3-631-54094-7. € 48.70.**

Polysemy seems nowadays to be one of pet topics for linguists of various theoretical persuasions. Structural linguists have noticed that the phenomenon of multiplicity of meanings, traditionally called polysemy, is relatively common and present in all natural languages. Although the phenomenon is easy to recognize—one expression is related with several meanings—its precise characterization is fraught with difficulties. It is, on the one hand, difficult to distinguish from homonymy, while, on the other, the boundary between polysemy and monosemy is not discrete, either. These serious problems resulted in a gradual loss of interest in the matter, particularly during the domination of the transformational-generative paradigm. The editors of the volume under review complain in their introduction about “denigration of polysemy,” pointing out that, for example, “the renewed interest in the issues of human communication (a good deal of which depends on language production and understanding) left the problem of polysemy untouched” and that “such a landmark linguistics publication as Jackendoff’s *Foundations of Language* allots polysemy some meagre four pages” (p. 9).

There is, however, no denying that polysemy comes into the focus of linguistic research as late as in the end of the 20th century, and that this is coupled with the rise of cognitive linguistics. In addition to studying fundamental conceptual questions relating to polysemy that were inherited from traditional approaches, the cognitive linguistic research starts focussing on polysemy as a problem of categorization as well as on the motivation for linking various meanings, chiefly meanings of lexical units linked by metaphor and metonymy (cf. Geeraerts 1993; Tuggy 1993; Ibarretxe Antuñano 1999, Cuyckens and Zawada 2001; Ravin and Leacock 2002; Nerlich, Todd, Vimala, and Clarke 2003). The research horizon has gradually widened and polysemy is no longer conceived as a purely lexical phenomenon: it becomes clear that it has intriguing grammatical, i.e. morphological and syntactic aspects. At the same time the problems of

polysemy become recognized as central in corpus linguistics and computational linguistics (cf. Gries 2003), in research into artificial intelligence as well as in psycholinguistic research (Cf. the overview in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2002, 2007).

This last avenue of research into polysemy is where the book under review continues. The volume under review is a collection of nine papers seeking to explore the relationship between the theoretical modelling and the mental representation of the perceived multiplicity of lexical meanings by raising a number of questions about the psychological representation of meanings, the types of relations existing between them, and about the interaction between meaning and grammar.

The expression “cognitive” in the title may be considered to be autodescriptive of the volume’s topic, i.e. polysemy. On the one hand, as mentioned above, it is concerned with the mental representation of polysemy. On the other, the theoretical orientation of individual contributions may also be qualified as cognitive in the broadest sense of the term (though, except for the paper by Gibbs and Lonergan, not as hard-core cognitive linguistics in the Langackerian and Lakovian sense).

The volume carries nine chapter of roughly equal size, divided into three thematic parts, with three chapters in each part. The volume opens with an introduction by the editors. After an overview of recent research into polysemy, the editors introduce the three central topics around which individual chapters are organized.

The first thematic part, entitled “*On what’s in the head*,” is dedicated to the issue of the cognitive psychological reality of models of polysemy. The first chapter in this part, “Reconciling linguistics and psycholinguistics: On the psychological reality of linguistic polysemy,” by Eleni Klepousniotou, discusses some inadequacies in psycholinguistic treatments of polysemy. On the one hand, psycholinguists have often failed to distinguish in their research between polysemy and homonymy. On the other hand, they overlooked the distinction between the regular or logical, metonymy-induced, polysemy, and metaphorically motivated polysemy.

The central question in Gregory L. Murphy’s contribution is the role of parsimony as a principle in analyzing polysemy. He shows that the match between theoretical and psychological perspectives on parsimony may be far from perfect. While parsimony is in many frameworks of linguistic research no doubt “a nearly universal desideratum of linguists, there is much evidence showing that

human memory is not as parsimonious as psychologists once thought.” It is demonstrated that a certain degree of explicit listing of senses of polysemous items seems unavoidable, even in the case of what we would like to consider regular polysemy.

In “Identifying, specifying and processing metaphorical word meanings”, Gibbs and Lonergan, however, argue against listing. They are concerned with a series of questions that researchers face while attempting to model the meaning of a word in lexicography, cognitive linguistics, and psycholinguistics, such as: How can we identify a particular sense of a word as metaphorical and are they recognized as such by language users? Are metaphorical meanings derived from more concrete, possibly embodied, source domain knowledge? Are they directly accessed from entrenched lexical representations or constructed on the fly thanks to the contextual information and past history of use? Is it possible to list the meanings of a polysemous word? Since meaning representation is situational, imagistic and embodied, they come to the conclusion “that metaphorically used words, and indeed all words, need not have fully specified meanings listed in a mental lexicon that is separate from non linguistic knowledge” (p. 88).

Part II of the volume (*The nature of polysemy*) stresses the role of theoretical linguistics in polysemy research. The first chapter in this part is “The phenomenon of polysemy and ways to describe it,” by Zalizniak. After a detailed overview of various types of ambiguity distinguished in Russian linguistics, she proceeds with four types of what she refers to as “non-zeugmatic meaning superposition.” As a way of representing polysemy which is claimed to ensure the semantic unity of a word she proposes the construct of conceptual schema, a formula sufficiently rich in content and operational, but at the same time without fixed values of parameters that must remain indeterminate.

In his chapter Pethő challenges a sharp distinction between metonymy-induced polysemy, which is often considered to be systematic, i.e. regular, and metaphorically motivated polysemy, which is seen as unpredictable. His case studies on nominal polysemy confirm that the contrast between these two is less than sharp, with quite systematic cases of metonymic facetization on the one extreme of the continuum, and “similarity-based metaphoric extensions” that are not productive on the other extreme end.

This part closes by the English translation of Kleiber (1995), in which he supplements his principle of integrated metonymy (IM) in the description of referential interpretation of utterances of the type *I'm parked out back* by the principle of meronymic integration (MI). The former specifies that a whole may be

characterized by certain features of certain parts, the latter provides for a transitory transformation of a relation of contiguity between two entities into a part-whole relation

Part III (*From words to constructions*) broadens the perspective so as to include what we might call constructional polysemy. Ladányi's paper, "Systematic polysemy of verbs in Hungarian," is a fine-grained study of the grammatical polysemy of Hungarian verbs that exhibit alternate valency frames. Cann and Mabugu study and interesting case of constructional polysemy in ChiShona, where the addition of the applicative suffix *-ir* augments the valency of the verb so that it can now also take an applied object, which can have a number of semantic roles. Finally, Szilárd's chapter is a study on the aspectual polysemy of the Hungarian verbal particle *el* 'away/off', whose addition changes an imperfective verbal base to a perfective one.

Overall, this volume is a useful addition to the collection of recent state-of-the-art volumes on polysemy, providing a thoroughly engaging and thought-provoking overview of open questions in polysemy on research. It is noteworthy for the breadth of approaches represented in its nine chapters as well as for the range of issues raised. The volume has been edited very thoroughly, with only a couple of typos. It can be recommended not only to linguists specializing in the topic area but also as a supplementary graduate text.

## References

- Cuyckens, Hubert and Britta Zawada, eds. (2001). *Polysemy in Cognitive Linguistics. Selected Papers from the Fifth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, Amsterdam, 1997*. Amsterdam - Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Geeraerts, Dirk (1993). Vagueness's puzzles, polysemy's vagaries. *Cognitive Linguistics* 4.3: 223-272.
- Ibarretxe Antuñano, Iraide (1999). *Polysemy and metaphor in perception verbs: A cross-linguistic study*. PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh.
- Kleiber, Georges (1995). Polysémie, transferts de sens et métonymie intégrée. *Folia Linguistica* 29.1-2: 105-132.
- Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Barbara (2002). Polysemy: Mechanisms and research methodology. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Barbara, Kamila Turewicz, eds. *Cognitive Linguistics Today*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 81-96.
- Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Barbara (2007). Polysemy. Geeraert, Dirk, Hubert Cuyckens, eds. *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 139-159.
- Nerlich, Brigitte, Zazzie Todd, Herman Vimala, David D. Clarke (2003). *Polysemy: Flexivle Patterns pf Meaning in Mind and Language*. Berlin - New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Ravin, Yael, Claudia Leacock (2002). *Polysemy: Theoretical and Computational Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tuggy, David (1993). Ambiguity, polysemy, and vagueness. *Cognitive Linguistics* 4.3: 273-290.